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AN ACCOUNT OF ELAU,

*A Malayan Papuan Child, Native of the Island of Erromanga,
one of the New Hebrides Group, Southern Pacific Ocean.*

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It is a well-known fact that Asiatics and natives of the Polynesian Islands, we may say indeed most natives of tropical climates, on being brought to England become liable after a prolonged residence in its variable climate to tubercular disease of the lungs, brain or intestines. A young native girl, a most interesting child, native of the Island of Erromanga, New Hebrides Group, exemplifies this. Her early history, followed by her fatal illness, may be of interest.

This child is classed by Colonel Hamilton Smith (who had frequent opportunities of seeing the child at Plymouth, where they both resided) among a mixed Papuan race, which he designates as Malayan Papuan, and most probably this race extends over nearly the whole of the New Hebrides Group, and not the true characteristic Papuan. The event which caused my obtaining and adopting this child was as follows:— It was on the 6th of March, 1830, during a second visit made to Gulantap Bay, Island of Erromanga, that on landing I observed several of the curly-headed children of the aborigines of the island mingled with a gang of natives of the Islands of Tongatabu and Rotuma, left on the island to cut sandal-wood, which was found in that locality in great abundance; these children, of various ages, were, when I first saw them, comfortably squatting around a fire eating some breadfruit which had just been cooked for them. They appeared so happy and content that no one would have suspected the danger they had so recently escaped. My curiosity was very naturally excited to know how the gang became possessed of these children. The natives of Tongatabu, in reply to my inquiries, gave me the following statement. During our absence they had succeeded in cultivating a friendship with one of the tribes of the aborigines. Soon after the amity had taken place, it was found that a feud existed between them and another tribe, and a battle between them was imminent, to decide the fate of one party or the other. They made great efforts to induce the Tonga natives to join them in an expedition

against their enemies ; their request was refused, and they left to fight their foes. After a long interval they returned as conquerors, bringing as captives of the war, six children. It appears that they had attacked their enemies, burnt the village, slain the parents, and captured the children alive for a further sacrifice. On the Tonga natives ascertaining their intention of killing their young captives and making them the victims for a cannibal feast, they determined to prevent it, and the result was a rupture between the Tonga and Erromanga natives. On the following night two of the children had been stolen, but greater precautions were afterwards taken for the safety of the others. From the anxiety of the natives to get them to destroy, they were considered by the Tonga people to be the children of chiefs. At New Zealand it is usual for a conquering party to return with men, women and children as captives, when they either kept them as slaves or they were sacrificed and eaten, and it is not improbable that a similar custom prevails among the natives of the New Hebrides Group. On leaving the island a few days after, with the natives of Tonga and Rotuma, a great number of whom were suffering from intermittent and bilious remittent fever, the children were taken on board, and they evinced great attachment to their preservers. There were four, three males and one female, and their ages were supposed to be as follows : one boy of nine years old, one of seven, one of six years, and the girl was also considered to be about six years of age. The female and one of the boys were of a lighter colour than the others, and probably both of a similar parentage. At Erromanga, Tanna and other islands in the vicinity, they evidently are a Papuan mixed with an Asiatic or Malayan race. At first I considered the Erromanga natives were more Papuan than those of Tanna, but from further evidences I had to change that opinion, and they have been correctly classed as Malayan-Papuan. In these children the hair was light and woolly, with a spiral twist, resembling dolls' curls, the nose flattened, thick lips, large mouth, eyes large, round and black and of great brilliancy ; the forehead in the female was high and well-developed, and in the others there was no deficiency of intellectual development, judging from external appearances. The limbs were slender, legs short, and arms long in proportion to the body, with a protuberance of the abdomen so remarkable as at first to induce me to consider it as proceeding from disease ; their bodies were covered with a down, more especially about the neck. The female had raised cicatrices in this form — — —

on the left side of the abdomen, which may probably be considered as a mark designating her tribe rather than as ornamental. Among the males was a very black-looking little fellow, who we named Mungo, possessing a large share of ugliness and an equal share of independence and impudence. When food with which they were unacquainted was offered to them, they first smelt it before it was eaten, and this was frequently done by Elau even after her arrival in London. On leaving Erromanga we called at Port Resolution, Island of Tanna, another of the same group. The natives were attracted by the presence of the children on board, more especially Elau, and as soon as it was reported on shore, women with children came on board the ship, rather an unusual proceeding, bringing presents of cooked food for the children, especially to Elau, who seemed to be the greatest attraction ;

among other things were small purple figs, which made very excellent tarts. It was the fruit of a new species of fig with large and handsome foliage, which from that circumstance I subsequently described and named *Ficus habrophylla*. A curious fact was the dislike of the children to our manufactured sugar; it is the more remarkable as the sugarcane (named Paria by the natives) is indigenous in the New Hebrides group, and is used by them in the raw state. When I gave Mungo a piece of bread he smelt and eat it, on giving a second piece upon which I had placed a piece of loaf sugar, he would not touch it, but on removing the sugar he speedily eat it. They would take a piece of sugar and smell it, but nothing could induce them to eat it; neither would they drink sweetened tea or coffee. Mungo with the two other males were left at the island of Rotuma, under care of one of the chiefs of the Island.

The ship having been driven on a coral reef during a severe gale at Rotuma, was got off again without sustaining any material injury. All the children were on shore except Elau, and another gale coming on, it was thought advisable to leave the island immediately with the child on board, and arrangements were made with the commander to take her to England. Although after she had been on board she would eat sweet things and drink sweetened tea and coffee, still her preference was pure water to any other beverage, and retained her native habits in eating frequently and at no fixed times. Wine or fermented liquors she would not take; pure water was her favorite drink, and of vegetables she was most partial to potatoes, as the nearest resemblance to her native yams. I brought in the same ship with Elau a young Ungka ape of Sumatra (*Simia syndactyla*), and they were very often seen sitting together, the animal with its long forepaw round Elau's neck, both lovingly eating part of the same biscuit. Sometimes Elau would amuse herself by tying a string round his leg and dragging him about the deck. Tired, however, of a practical joke in which he had no share of the amusement, he would endeavour to disengage himself, and on finding his efforts fruitless would quietly walk up to his little tormentor and inflict a gentle bite upon her arm. This always procured him his liberty; and Elau, rubbing her arm, would say "Ungka no like play now."

On arriving in England she was much pleased with the steamers, and indeed every object called forth her admiration and delight, and there was nothing that escaped her notice. She related in England events which occurred at Erromanga, relative to the destruction of her parents and their village, the native mode of cooking, and other customs among them, which we never heard her describe on board the ship, or were the subjects mentioned before her. When orders were given to have some dresses made for her, she requested to have made "dresses like other ladies," and a wild burst of joy was expressed when she saw herself arrayed in a pink frock with the usually gay ribbons; she had instinctively acquired one of the first stages of civilization, the love of personal adornment; and why not? for it is said that after Eve had eaten of the tree of knowledge, the first request she made to Adam was for a dress. Elau could not be bribed by niceties; if hungry she readily eat any food, preferring that which was simple. Her disposition was liberal, and she would readily share with others what she had, even when unsolicited. She retains, when in society, great self-command and

a high spirit of native independence. I took her one evening to a conversazione at the Royal Institution in Albemarle Street, London; although it was the first time she had entered a large room splendidly lighted and filled with company, she did not for a moment manifest the slightest shyness or fear, but left me and mingled with the crowd, and permitted all of those who were attracted by her novel appearance to speak to her, was very affable with them, and would then walk about the room inspecting the exhibits, some of which were from her native island. When placed on the table by Professor Faraday for the inspection of the ethnologists who were present, she was also fearless, and appeared to be highly amused at the interest she excited; this feeling was displayed in many other subsequent instances when she accompanied me to parties, at one of which Mr. Sheridan Knowles, the dramatic writer, was present, who evinced a deep interest in the little stranger. At this house in the vicinity of London, she resided by invitation for a few days; one of the daughters sang a simple, pathetic ballad with such feeling and taste as to excite the attention of the child, who was playing about the room; she came to the piano, kept her eyes fixed on the fair songstress during the continuance of the ballad, and with such effect did it act on the feelings of the young untutored savage, that the tears trickled down her cheeks, and she never moved from her position until she had finished.

From a communication I made in 1834 to my friend and celebrated writer, Mrs S. C. HALL, she published in the *Juvenile Annual* for 1835, the interesting account of "Anecdotes of Elau, a Papuan Girl," which, as the book has been long out of print, I will republish some portion as follows:—

"My dear Mrs Hall," exclaimed a little girl, while looking over one of my scrap books, "whose portrait is that? I never saw such large black eyes, such frizzy hair, such a brown skin! Was she a black?" "No," I replied, "she was not exactly a negro. But, if you please, I will tell you all I know of that very interesting child; and for the information which I can communicate I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. G. BENNETT, the gentleman who brought little Elau from Erromanga, one of the New Hebrides Islands in the Southern Pacific Ocean. Elau was a Papuan—a race of people distributed over a large portion of the globe. Travellers have found great difficulty in becoming at all acquainted with them; they are generally considered fierce and warlike, and indeed, there is no doubt but that poor little Elau would have been killed and eaten but for the kindness of the natives of Tongatubu, who being then on the island, prevented her being devoured by those of an opposite party by whom she and several other children were taken prisoners. Mr. BENNETT then brought her to England."

"While the ship in which he sailed remained some time at the island of Tanna (another of the New Hebrides group), it was curious to observe the interest this child excited in the females of the country, who came continually paddling in their canoes to the vessel's side. Many of them brought their little tawny children to visit Miss Elau. So numerous, indeed, were her visitors, that the deck was crowded with them. These little creatures, seeing her like one of themselves, did not regard her as any very great curiosity, and Elau appeared careless about forming

any new acquaintances—perhaps somewhat proud, having a neat, clean garment round her dark person ; whilst if they had anything upon them, it was merely a narrow wreath of leaves, and but few could boast or seemed to care about even that. There was an elderly woman amongst the number, who brought a large basket of yams, sugar-cane, &c., as a present for the child, and she was highly gratified at being permitted to “squat” herself down upon the poop of the ship and feed her—an operation which must have been like that of a large baboon stuffing a small nigræte monkey. The first stock of food being exhausted, and the child crammed by way of a morning repast, the woman went on shore for a fresh supply, with which she returned in the afternoon ; and she continued this during the whole of the time the ship remained in Port Resolution (Tanna). Elau was, I assure you, a subject of great interest, not only to the young, but to scientific persons. She was like a new creation, upon which all were anxious to try the effects of civilization and education. She was, moreover, though of barbarous and cruel parents, a most gentle and affectionate child, possessed of extreme generosity of spirit, and would frequently go without herself in order that all her companions should partake of her bounty. One day, after having divided some barley-sugar among her friends, one of them (who had been absent when the division took place) entered the room and joined the party. Elau appeared quite distressed, there was no more barley-sugar left, and her little friend had none. ‘You got no barley-sugar? Never mind ; here barley-sugar.’ At the same time taking a piece from her own mouth and offering it. She did not evince the slightest suspicion in her character, but would confidently place her greatest treasure in the hands of any person. A shilling was given by Elau to a lady to keep for her, which she was in the habit of occasionally taking from the workbox in which it was kept to play with. One afternoon she had been in the garden with it, and, returning, the shilling was not in her possession. On inquiry, it was found she had lost it. She was reproved, and sent back to look for it. In about a quarter of an hour she entered with great glee. ‘Well, Elau, where is the shilling?’ ‘Me no find shilling ; never mind, me give garden shilling.’ She always showed much concern and tenderness towards those who were ill, and was ever ready to assist and wait upon them. I have heard that when the lady with whom she resided had been confined to her room from indisposition, she would remain in constant attendance by the bedside, and permit no one but herself to take up the necessaries she required. She would forsake her playthings and her playmates and watch and wait and wait and watch for hours and hours ; her black eyes filled with interest and affection, and often moistened with tears for the sufferings of others. She was very fond of a young lady who died of consumption, and stood one morning by her bedside looking earnestly in her face. ‘You no well, Jane?’ ‘Indeed I am not well, dear,’ was the reply of the interesting invalid. Elau seemed still more anxious, and then after a pause continued, ‘You say prayers, Jane?’ ‘Yes, I always say my prayers.’ Then the little brown creature added, ‘You ask God, God make you well!’ A simple and beautiful precept, which older and more experienced persons than the half-tutored savage of Erromanga would do well to believe and practise.”

"Elau, like many whom I know, was exceedingly fond of gay colours. A neeklace was to her a source of delight; this was natural, as when Mr. Bennett first saw her she had a native neeklace of shells around her neck. She had also no mean idea of her personal charms, and no greater affront could be offered than to tell her she was *ugly*, or to say she was a black child. She had a very correct recollection of any circumstances connected with her native country, and used to say, 'Plenty fowls, plenty fish, plenty eggs, Erromanga. No put egg in water, make boil, in Erromanga; not got pot, no got kettle, but put egg on fire, make burn egg. Plenty rat, plenty pig, Erromanga; no got dog, no cat, no horse, in Erromanga.'

"When assuring any one that she would rise early in the morning, she expressed herself in a peculiar manner,—'*Me wake my eyes and get up early.*' And what makes your skin such a different colour from mine, Elau? asked the servant one day when washing her. 'My mother one very dirty woman; she no wash me,' was the reply. As for her colour, it received always from herself the appellation of brown—black was sure to offend, and copper-coloured was equally insulting. When she was asked, 'Of what colour are you, Elau?' 'I am a brown girl,' was the invariable answer. Elau related to the servant, on seeing her engaged in cooking in the kitchen, that 'They no cook fish at Erromanga like you—make wrap in leaf, father dig pit, having made fire there, put fish in, and cover over with earth; when done, take out and make eat.' Thus describing the mode of cooking as adopted at Erromanga, and indeed the whole of the Polynesian Islands, and it shows that she had more vivid recollections of her native country than it was at first supposed she could retain, having been not more than six years old when she was taken away. Elau was listening attentively one evening to a lady who was singing; when the song was concluded she requested the lady to sing it again, 'because' she said, 'if you will; I will go and fetch up Beater (her favorite dog) and puss to hear you.'" The lady smiled and the company tittered; this, she thought, proceeded from the proposal of having the dog and puss in the drawing-room, where, she well knew, they were never permitted to intrude; but as they were her favorites, she desired that they, as well as herself, should enjoy the song—so, on the company laughing at the request, she immediately rejoined 'but after they have heard the singing of lady, they shall go downstairs again.'

She never recommended anyone to visit Erromanga; and from the remarks upon the land of her birth, she did not appear to evince any partiality towards it or any desire to revisit her countrymen. When inquiry was made, and a wish expressed by anyone to visit her island, she always informed them that 'they very bad *black* people at Erromanga, make kill and eat you; no such good people there as in this country; there people make fight and kill; they all very bad black people.'

"When she first landed in England, all strings and ribands were termed rope-yarns; and it was very ludicrous to hear her say 'the rope-yarn of my shoe untied;' 'only see what pretty rope-yarns I got on my bonnet!' When Mr. BENNETT visited Plymouth (where she then resided) in March, 1832, he found her much improved and a favorite

with everyone, from the young tottering infant to the most aged with whom she was acquainted; her engaging and interesting manners had won the hearts of all, and everyone appeared interested in the welfare of the orphan stranger, now so far removed from the land of her birth. Many who had often said 'that a black child would be a subject of horror to them' were most desirous of having Elau constantly with them: this shows how much more an amiable and kindly feeling contributes to the happiness of our fellow-creatures than that beauty of which we are sometimes and so absurdly vain."

"Elau was remarkably partial to society, and her work was speedily laid aside when visitors came; she was not a little proud of her portrait being taken, and any approbation bestowed upon her behaviour, needlework, or dancing, was always well received. She soon learnt to read; and her needlework was neat and clean. Her dancing was very graceful; she kept time to the music with great accuracy, although she never received any instructions. She was much given to imitation, not from any desire to mock or mimic, but simply from a wish to do as others did; and having witnessed some rope dancing, she was discovered tying a rope from one chair to another, and trying to get upon it. She appeared much vexed at not being able to succeed. Her hair was curly, and small tufts, having a spiral twist, arose in different parts of the head; thus, when suffered to grow long, it had a very peculiar character; when cut off, the little tufts had the appearance of doll's curls. When this tuft of hair with a spiral twist is drawn out, although upon the head it is not more than half an inch in length, it is found to be nearly double; it is thus that the Tanna natives twist around these tufts a filament of the bark of a tree, continuing it as the hair increases in length, until it hangs back profusely over the shoulders, and gives to them the appearance of being a straight-haired race. Although at Erromanga this custom is not adopted, yet at Immer, Aneitum, Erromanga, and most of the other islands of the group, the same custom as at Tanna prevails."

"Elau was fond of 'white babies,' and loved to make them presents; she also liked to play with children of her own age, but would always take the lead in every amusement. One evening, having some juvenile visitors with whom she was eagerly engaged in playing, a notice came in the midst of their sport that it was late, and the servant had arrived for the young ladies. Elau did not wish to part with them, and therefore thought to detain them by blowing out the candles, saying, 'Now little girls no can go in the dark.' While it is impossible not to laugh at the simplicity of the stranger, there is much to admire and initiate about her. Falsehood or equivocation was unknown to her unsophisticated mind; although she received she never gave flattery; she spoke, as all children ought, the truth; and it was both instructive and beautiful to see how perfectly free she was from every species of duplicity; this gave her sometimes the appearance of rudeness, though she was quite incapable of intentionally hurting the feelings of any human being. She could not bear to see a dress either torn or spotted, and if any one came near her with torn or soiled habiliments she was sure to reprove them for it in the following words, 'your gown dirty, what for you no more make wash!' or, 'look here! your coat got hole, why you no more get mend?' she not only disliked being teased,

but never teased other people. If Mr. Bennett gave away anything which she knew belonged to him when she was not present, she would invariably claim and take possession of it for him until informed by himself that he had given it away. My little friend then asked, 'did she eat as we do, or did she like or dislike any particular kind of food.' She would not eat any portion of the *inside* of an animal, and always preferred vegetables to meat; nor would she eat anything she had never before seen without *smelling* to it. She could never be termed either greedy or dainty; and in eating, as in all things, preferred the gratification of others to her own."

"The servant took her to the Hoe at Plymouth, one night to see the bonfire, rockets, &c., which took place in honor of the Coronation of William the Fourth; but on seeing it she was greatly alarmed, exclaiming, 'that is the sort of fire at Erromanga.' She almost went into fits so great was her terror, and was obliged to be taken home; she declared she saw the little children roasting. The effect produced upon her was so strong, that when at night in bed, sleeping as usual with the servant, she would cry out in her disturbed sleep, 'do not let them burn me.' The fear originated most probably from the impression left on her juvenile mind, of the destruction of the village, made by a hostile tribe at the time she was captured; for, from the knowledge we have of the native mode of warfare among these, as among other savages, when an attack is made by a hostile tribe upon another tribe, they commence by an unexpected inroad on the village, burning it, and slaughtering the sleeping inhabitants; and this scene of conflagration and terror was re-called to the child's mind when she witnessed the bonfire.

What was very amusing was to overhear the child criticising the broad Cornish dialect of the servant, correcting the pronunciation of her words. This interesting child died at Plymouth and was attended during her illness by my friend Peter Franklin Bellamy, who sent me an account of the cause of her illness and the post-mortem examination, which I have attached to this notice of her. She was deeply regretted by all who knew her. The children with whom she played, and who can call to remembrance so many instances of generosity and self-denial. the little toddling things whom she would, if permitted watch over, and smile upon from morning to night, the household dog, and the domestic cat, whom, in the generosity of her spirit she wished to partake even of the pleasure she derived from music. All miss the dark browed girl from the Southern Seas, whose savage habits, as far as she herself was concerned, were more gentle than our own. She was supposed to have entered into her tenth year, and bore her wasting and painful disorder with a gentle patience well worthy of imitation. She believed that when she died she would go to heaven, and felt exceeding grateful to all who attended her during her illness. She was interesting in every way, and as her mind developed itself, she would doubtless have been able to draw conclusions, and give us much information respecting her own people of whom our knowledge is still limited.

The photograph is copied from a coloured drawing taken from life, by a lady at Plymouth in 1834.

The following account of the illness, death, and post-mortem examination was sent to me from Plymouth (in 1834), by Peter Franklin Bellamy, Esq., M.R.C.S., who attended her during her illness :—

Sophia Elau, aged 10 years, a native of the Island of Erromanga, one of the Polynesian Islands, brought to England by my friend George Bennett, Esq., Surgeon, first came under my notice for illness in March, 1833, at which time she was attacked by influenza, then epidemic. About a month after, I observed enlargement of the glands of the neck, some difficulty, rapidity and wheezing during respiration, and prominence of the abdomen, which prominence, I was told, had always existed, and seemed, from Dr. Bennett's observations, as a characteristic of her native figure ; but on pressure of the abdomen, I discovered some obscure feeling of enlarged glands and dull pain. My prognosis, even at that time, was unfavourable, and I recommended precautionary measures in the way of diet and clothing. A few weeks after, as the enlarged glands of the neck were not at all reduced by the common treatment, I tried the use of iodine topically, but with no benefit, as it produced inflammation. During the summer of 1833, her health appeared to improve considerably, and the glands of the neck became nearly reduced to their normal size. The winter proved unusually mild, and she got through it without illness, but in January, 1834, I again observed considerable enlargement of the glands of the neck. In the month of March last, she again suffered from influenza, and from that time gradually sank ; the fatal disease, *tabes mesenterica*, more fully developed itself, and she died on the 6th of June, 1834, at 6 p.m.

The symptoms which evinced themselves were great wasting of the body, not from colliquative diarrhœa, nor diaphoresis, but from intestinal absorption, carried on for the purpose of keeping up a supply of blood, a harsh, dry skin, at first a capricious appetite, then almost a complete dislike to food, and at length painful and difficult deglutition, but with occasionally a great desire for food, both solid and fluid ; and not more than two or three hours before her death she asked for and eat greedily a piece of bread and butter. There was hardness and prominence of the abdomen, with a dull pain produced when pressure was made over the umbilical region. The alvine discharges were exceedingly fœtid, and either green or black ; the urine scanty and fœtid. Slight cough, with expectoration of small quantities of ropy mucus. Hurried respiration, accompanied sometimes with a wheezing and at others with a cooing noise ; panting and occasional palpitation on movement ; great enlargement of the glands of the neck, and latterly a fœtid serous discharge from the right ear. Slight attacks of hectic fever, frequent drowsiness, frequent sleep during the day but great restlessness at night ; peevishness and a most painful anxiety of countenance, occasional spasmodic twitchings of the face, with a drawing of the mouth to one side ; the voice was weak and sepulchral, with a difficulty of articulation, the breath was offensive, tongue white, pulse small and weak, averaging one hundred in a minute ; legs, œdematous ; and the intellect was unimpaired until within twenty-four hours of her death, when delirium occurred, accompanied by excessive restlessness. Two or three times before her death she fainted, and death appeared to be near, but it terminated in a short sleep and partial recovery. During the last four

hours she relapsed into a state of insensibility which terminated in death. Post-mortem forty-eight hours after death. The form of the head was very fine, showing a large development of the intellectual faculties, forehead expanded and high, and the vertex elevated; the neck was much enlarged by the increased size of the glands. The thorax was contracted, having the sternum much arched; the cartilages of the second and third pairs of ribs were much curved and projecting, and the serobiculus cordis larger and deeper than usual. The abdomen was prominent; on the left side were several rows of short raised cicatrices. The spine slightly curved to the left, a large cicatrice on each side of the lumbar region. The arms unproportionally long, the scapulæ projecting; the whole of the body exceedingly attenuated, and four feet seven inches long. There was no enlargement of the inguinal or axillary glands. On incision the body was almost bloodless, the whole of the adipose tissue had been absorbed and the muscles pale, flabby and soft. An enlarged glandular body about the size of half a pea just at the root of the aorta, projected apparently into the pericardium. No examination of the head was made. The glands of the neck were enlarged and indurated; the stomach was empty and the intestines nearly so; the gall bladder was full of bile; liver, spleen and kidneys paler than usual. The whole of the mesenteric glands greatly enlarged, in the greater mesentery there was one mass of enlarged glands thicker and larger than my hand, of a yellow colour and firm consistence; there was a slight adhesion of the apex of the left lung to the pleura, and more extensive adhesion of the right lung, more especially at its posterior surface. There was about eight ounces of serum in the cavities of the pleura. The bronchial glands were greatly enlarged, the substance of the lungs were of a greyish colour and thickly studded with tubercles, much larger in the left than in the right lung, and the bronchial cells were full of a dirty mucus. The heart was pale and flacid, there was about an ounce of fluid in the pericardium.





